Basic Burmese Concepts of Health and Sickness.

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The Burmese regard health as the best of all earthly blessings. Although Buddha referred to the living body as a decaying corpse, which it was folly to feed, he recognised the necessity for bodily health in order to carry out the all-important mental activities connected with the Buddhist religion. It is then essential for each person to be as physically and mentally sound as he is able. The forces governing health and sickness are both supernatural and natural each with its own set of medical specialists. The specialists are called for only when the case is far advanced there being an extensive lore of home precautions and curative practices. In general, disorders caused by nats and ghosts (supernatural) or magic are recognised by their sudden, catastrophic or otherwise unusual nature, and are both instigated and cured by magical means. The natural disorders are caused by weaknesses in the constitution of the patient, foreign bodies, dangerous foods and such-like means, and are cured through knowledge of medical principles. The germ concept of disease is completely lacking, although when foreign matter is seen, as mosquito larvae in water, it is frequently regarded as unhealthy. The western idea of omnipresent harmful bacteria is regarded as fantastic in being contrary to observation - "our ancestors have lived for countless generations in these surroundings which you regard as dangerous", they will say. There are some 80 different kinds of PO MYOSHSA or harmful ingredients that can infect the body. These range from undesirable ingredients in food to mystical influences that rise in the teeth to cause tooth-ache. The cleanliness of the Burmese, as seen in their several daily baths and emphasis on clean clothes, is not out of regard for "hygenic" reasons, but rather for social reasons. One must look his best in public so as not to give offense. to the eye or nose. The sick person is never washed since cold water would have the effect of driving the fever-heat inward to a fatal degree. The date for resumption of bathing for the convalescent is carefully considered; mistakes can result in relapse and death. Cool breezes must be avoided by the sick person for similar reasons. The house doors closed during the day invariably mean sickness within.

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561 262 removed. Old folks habitually like bitter foods - especially tea leaves. Eating prepared foods left over night is strictly prohibited as a cause of illnesses. Curry must be eaten while it is hot. (There are no apparent reasons - just observation from eating spoild [757] foods). Boiled rice and fried dry fish comprises the standard sick diet in addition to other foods especially prescribed for the care or 177 757 for giving vigour. It is interesting to note that English foods such as tinned biscuits ("Golden Puff biscuits") or milk preparations 262 ("Hollicks") are preferred for the sick diet by those who can afford them. The "strong" tastes of these foods give strength to the sick person. Lately, western medicines have been recognized as powerful. U Myaing's experiences above show the means by which this idea is established. However, the Burmese doctor is relied on even by families of the administrative class in Rangoon.

●759 When a case of sickness seems beyond response to normal treatments, and it has been diagnosed as of a natural cause, the SAY SAYA (medicine-master) is called in. "Foot-hire" at a stiff rate of Rs.5/- for the first visit and 2 or 3 rupees for succeeding visits is paid for this service. "Say-saya, we place the case in your hands" is entoned, to which the doctor replies "If our faith coincides (i.e. patients and doctors) then we will be successful - otherwise we cannot go against Karma". The doctor notes the symptoms, feels forehead for fever, inquires of colour of urine and the course of the disorder. He then chants in verse the diagnosis as "eyes yellow, [198] action irregular, forehead moist - (giving nature of sickness)". The treatment also follows in verse form as a rigid formula prescribing medicines and diet. The doctor is a specialist in one or more types of medicine which he has concocted such as "blood purifying medicine", "fever medicine", "purgative medicine", and he will have [755] been called in because of this specialty. Charmed water is frequently given. Here verse formula is said over a cup of water to give it power.

SAY SAYA are trained when young men as apprentices to older doctors. The training includes memorising many books giving diagnosis and formulas for curing as well as learning the master's arts.

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A village of 2000 persons may have 10 or more doctors. The more successful "move up" to the towns and cities. Most of the medicines are herbs and chemicals including roots, leaves, fruits, berries, salt, and sulphur. Many of the herbs are imported from India. Parts of animals such as crocodile skin, pig and horse droppings are used less frequently. The doctor must be a moral man of good character or the medicine will not be effective. He uses the right index finger "medical finger" to stir the concoctions. The family of the sick person may either prepare the medicine themselves from the doctor's directions or take Mi's on special preparations. Many cures are effected by regulating diet, and in most cases this plays an important part in the cure. The knowledge which the SAY-SAYA must command is extensive including not only the medic' wisdom of the ages but also the peculiarities of the patient and above all the relationship of the seasons (weather conditions) to the case.

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If one doctor fails to cure, another may be called in after dismissing the first. A keen feeling of rivalry exists between the various doctors and there are no cooperative consultations. Although each prides himself on a specialty the secrets of which he jealously guards he feels qualified also to handle any other medical problems. "If two are of the same thoughts, they are enemies" emphasises the general attitude of competition seen in many other phases of Burmese life. The Burmese doctors are invariably applied to for help first. If this does not succeed modern midicinal facilities are sought. If modern medicine fails it is greatly derided. Maung Maung Than's aunt was ill for a long time and, after consulting many Burmese specialists she was taken to the Rangoon Mission Hospital where her case was diagnosed as advanced breast cancer beyond cure. His uncle, though not a medical man, is recognised as a last resort specialist who when the patient is beyond any other help administers lime juice (ordinarily fatal where fever is involved) in a "do or die" treatment. He is warned off when he appears at a sick house for the risk often does not pay off.

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Illness is frequently caused by supernatural spirits acting either independently or as agents for "black magic" specialists.

Nats' powers for good include protecting the village from deceit attacks but does not extend to modern warfare. When the Japanese armies were slicing up through Tenasserim in 1941, the elders of Maung Maung Than's village prayed for nat protection against the invaders. The nats replied "Dear Villagers we ourselves are wearing raised longyis in this crisis (ready to run)." This is a Rangoon town joke told among the sophisticated collegiates at the University. Not so well defined, but still sensed is a growing distrust of the powers of nats to combat modern evils.

The nats can best be visualized as supernatural despots each with his province (the home, village, sea, babies) and each exacting tribute of periodic or constant attention in the form of flowers or food, red and white cloth strips, and an altar which may have the image of the nat carved in wood (or moulded in modern plasticene). Banyan trees with their multiple, snake-like trunks, are the most common places of abode. When disaster in the form of sickness or other ill fortune strikes, the nats are appeased with offerings immediately. The SAY SAYA will frequently check with the family of his patient to make sure this has been done. In Rangoon and elsewhere, business men whose fortunes have been good are the main supporters of the nat festivals which are given for the entertainment of all the nats once a year in October, for a seven day period. NAT KADAW (nat-wives) are the mediums who contact the nats by becoming possessed by them at this festival and other special occasions (for a single nat) throughout the year. These are married women or more rarely homosexuals who dance, answer questions and give opinions when possessed.

Punishment for offense against the nats is first shown by accidents or sudden illnesses like paralysis meted out to the offender. If the offender continues the village as a whole will gradually be afflicted. For example, when a drunkard offends the nats with blasphemous language evil falls on the entire village. Villagers led by the elders and a prominent NAT-KADAW go in a body to the major banyan tree shrine to have an understanding with the offended nats. Offerings are given and attention of the nats called to the woes of

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25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

Dealers, with the exception of 1164 [463 554]

276. THE LORD OF HELL RECEIVES HIS STEWARD'S ACCOUNT OF THE PAINS INFLICTED ON SINNERS (p. 121).

The dealer in medicine, who is at the same time the physician, do not receive the title *sayá*—teacher, doctor—which is accorded to every master workman. The physician (*sithama sayá*) makes no charge for his advice, but only for his medicines. There is, however, a school of doctors who oppose the use of drugs, and rely upon the regulation of diet and on shampooing; they make their charge for the latter operation. Ague (intermittent fever, *pyá-na*) is the commonest complaint in Burma, which no one escapes. The remittent form of malarial fever is also common. Attacks may be light and pass away of themselves, or they may be severe and protracted. Malaria is the chief cause of mortality. The common treatment is to encourage sweating. Aperients are not resorted to if it can be helped, as the Burmese drugs are drastic. In severe cases the head is shaved. Quinine was at one time making its way in the bazárs; but soon adulteration began to be practised, and it lost repute. The scheme of selling the Government quinine at the post offices may be effectual in rehabilitating the medicine. Santonin worm-tablets likewise had a great reputation until adulteration began. Rheumatism is common in Burma. It is treated by shampooing (*a-hnéik*), which in this complaint is most efficacious. *A-hnéik* is a kneading of the muscles and nervous plexuses; massage, in the sense of rubbing, is not practised. The expert shampooers possess an empirical knowledge of the interdependences in the nervo-muscular system which is remarkable. An attack of lumbago, which would cripple one for days, is cured in half an hour. Vapour baths, over the water of hot springs, are also resorted to. Heart-burn and colic are common ailments.

277. BURMAN APOTHECARY.

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Burmese AP4

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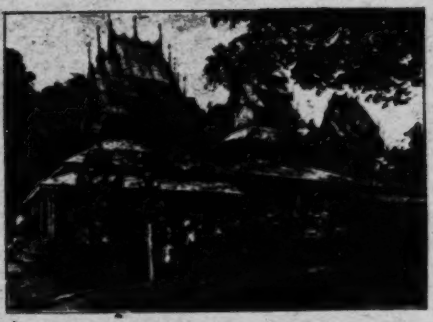
278. SHAMPOOING (A-HNEIK).

Dysentery is much less frequent in natives than in European residents. Consumption and pneumonia are rare, but coughs and bronchitis are common. Cancer is not unknown. Measles and chicken-pox follow a mild course. Scarlet fever does not occur, nor does typhus. It is uncertain whether typhoid fever existed in Burma or has been introduced; it is rare among the natives, but attacks Europeans in a bad form. Venereal diseases lurk in the towns. (For leprosy, see p. 41.) Diarrhœa and cholera recrudesce every hot season. There are no records of other pestilence. Small-pox rages in severe epidemics, but with greatly diminished incidence where vaccination has been accepted. Native practitioners were acquainted with inoculation. In introducing voluntary vaccination the British Government has met with great success. The introduction of this measure exemplifies how grotesque the arguments may be that prevail upon the people. The alleged motive of the government was too improbable; so wiseacres cast about for another. What more likely than a dream of the Queen of England—that a child existed in Burma who would overthrow her dominion! This child could not be known, but it would be reached and removed by the plan of poisoning the blood of the whole generation. It was many years before

279. HOROSCOPE ON PALM-LEAF.

the myth was dispelled. In 1894, when small-pox was known to be approaching from Karennî, the Karén (nat-worshipping) village of Bilin-Mèwaing among others, consisting of sixty souls, submitted to vaccination. The lymph took in all but sixteen cases. Six months later small-pox reached the locality. Twelve

25; Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Burmese AP4



268. KOTHENA YOK (p. 191).

of the unsuccessfully vaccinated caught the disease, and ten of them died. None of the forty-four were attacked. These statistics could be multiplied. The medicine-dealers keep many of the crude commercial drugs, besides simples of their own collecting. Of the former, the principal are aloes, jalap, croton-seed, senna, bitter barks, catechu, opium, camphor, ginger, cardamom and other aromatics. The medicinal use of castor-oil is not known, though the plant is common. Spirits are now used medicinally. Many of the vegetable remedies are almost inert (see *The Burmese, what do they know of medicine?* by Dr. D. H. Cullimore). But there is one that deserves to be known, namely, the Shan remedy for tape-worm, *thsé*, which is both effectual and mild. Among the mineral drugs are mercury, calomel, sulphur, blue and green vitriols, alum, salammoniac, nitre. There is a whole category of supposititious remedies, tiger's gall, rhinoceros' blood, ant-eater's scales, and so forth; they are charred before being made up. Allied to this class of remedies is that of charms, the vendors of which (nat-wives—*nakkadáw*) trade on the superstition that disease is caused by demons. Every patient will be as particular to mention his star as to describe his complaint. He will be advised to avoid certain classes of remedies on certain days. The "Sunday son" must not purge on Friday, and so on. In times of epidemic and panic, *thèbhuzadi* are erected at every house, as they likewise are in cases of sickness (No. 431). They are merely of sand, held together with circles of bast. Sometimes they are erected to avert calamity declared to be impending in a *sìwèpò-khwàn*, a message on gold foil dropped from heaven by a *Thadyà* (p. 186). Images are dedicated

291. CHILDREN'S BAZAR (p. 161).

Although the kingdoms of Prome and Thaton probably based their wealth on trade and commerce, and the kingdom of Pagan based its power and wealth on commerce, the Burmese have been simple agriculturists throughout their history, and therefore Burmese customary law of contract and torts dealt with the business of agriculture, such as water-rights, land-rights, hire of cattle, carts, and implements, and with the relations between employers and laborers. As has been stated before, the Burmese law of contract and tort is no longer valid, and although the Burmese still remain agriculturalists, their business of agriculture is no longer simple as in the days before the British annexation. Nonetheless, some of the rules of law in contract and torts are still of interest. For example, let us consider the law relating to payment of wages to laborers. The Burmese law did not give emphasis to that part of the wages which was to be in the form of money. But it specifically laid down that (1) in the case of an agricultural laborer, he was to receive, in addition to wages in money, a suit of clothes at the end of each "season"—i.e., the "growing season" and the "reaping season," and (2) in the case of a nonagricultural laborer, he was to receive, throughout the period of his employment and in addition to wages in money, "regular meals of rice and curry." For the agricultural laborer, who had his own store of paddy, clothing was of great consequence, and to the nonagricultural laborer food was of great consequence. Thus the Burmese law ensured that the fluctuation either in the general level of wages or in the value of money should not adversely effect either the laborer or his employer. Moreover, as both the laborer and the employer wore the same homespun clothes and ate the same food, the arrangement was fair to both parties. With regard to professional services rendered also, the Burmese law attempted to be fair to both parties, as could be seen from the following rules of law regarding physicians and lawyers:

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If a physician has been called for fee to attend to a sick person, but the sick person recovers or dies before the physician reaches

671 his bedside, the physician shall be entitled to his fee if he has
759 reached at least the doorway of the sick person's house. In the same
693 way, if a suit is withdrawn or settled, or the judge does not find it necessary to call upon the pleader to argue, the pleader shall be entitled to his fee if he has spoken even a few words, or if he has just pulled up the sleeve of his gown in a gesture of speech. If a client wishes to call in another physician, he shall pay the full fees to the first physician, and shall also offer him a cup of water in token of friendship. If a client wishes to engage another pleader, he shall pay the full fee to the first pleader.

671 The following rules regarding void sales and purchases will
432 further illustrate the essential similarity of Burmese law and the English law of contract:

> There are four cases when a sale or a purchase is void: (i) if the price fixed is below its value; by value it is meant market value at the time of the sale, and even a ruby worth a kingdom before may be sold for one-eighth of a basket of rice, if that is the prevailing market value of rubies; (ii) if the buyer is aware that the ownership of the property is being disputed; (iii) if the whereabouts of the property are not known; and (iv) if the owner of the property is in confinement or under duress.

672 Just as in the English law, under the Burmese law a per-
683 son was responsible for any injury which was the foreseeable consequence of his acts. Thus, it was a rule of law that if a person induced another person to accompany him to a place full of perils, and the latter suffered injury, the former was to pay damages to the full amount of the injury; however, if the second person was aware of the dangerous nature of the place, the damages payable were only half the amount of compensation for the injury. Under the same principle, if a host entertained his guest so well that the latter became intoxicated, the host owed a duty in law to see that the guest reached his home safely; if the guest should be allowed to go home unattended, and if he should die or suffer injury on the way through illness, exposure, snake-bite, attack by robbers or by wild beasts, the host was liable to pay full compensation. The